

A
DISCOURSE

Concerning a
Death-bed Repentance.

By WILLIAM ASSHETON, D. D.
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Chaplain to his Grace the Duke of
ORMOND.

The Second Edition.

L O N D O N,

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TO THE
KING'S
MOST
Excellent Majesty.

May it please Your Majesty,

TO accept of this
Treatise, part of
which was preach-
ed in Your Royal Chappel
before the late Queen, Your
Majesty's Dearest Consort of
Blessed Memory. That I
did not then Present it to the
Hands of that Excellent Prin-
cess, was the Imperfection of
A 2 the

The Dedication.

the Work, (I having designed some further enlargement upon that Subject) otherwise I shoul mostd chearfully have complied with some approving Intimation then given, in order to a Command for the Publishing of it. The whole being now finished, is most humbly submitted to Your Majesty's Censure, by

Y^{our} M^{AJESTY}'s

*Most Humble and Obedient
Subject and Servant,*

William Assheton.

THE

T H E
P R E F A C E.

HAVING *made my self*
a Debtor to the Publick,
for A Plain Method of
Devotion for Sick and Dying
Persons: *And one chief part of*
that Devotion being the Exercise
of a true Repentance, (for the Mi-
nister who visits the Sick Person, is
directed by the Church of England
to examine, Whether he repent
him truly of his Sins?) lest Men
should from hence be encouraged to
defer their Repentance to a Sick
and Dying Bed, (as if they might
safely enjoy their Sins in their
Health, because they are admonish-

The Preface.

ed to Repent when they come to Dye) I have therefore very faithfully examined that matter: And have endeavoured in the following Treatise to convince them, That though Repentance, as all other Graces, must be exercised and improved upon the approach of Death (for our Lamps must be trimmed when the Bridegroom comes) yet A Death-bed Repentance is neither comfortable nor safe.

THE

T H E
C O N T E N T S.

*THE Soul is Immortal, and shall be
Eternally either Happy or Miserable.* Page 1

*This Life the only time to fit and prepare
us for our Future Eternal State.* 2

*The Vicious, Sensual, and Impenitent, shall
be miserable.* Ibid.

*But such as are Obedient to the Laws of
the Gospel shall be happy.* 3

*Hence it is both our Interest and Duty, to
take care of our Souls, and provide for
Eternity.* 2 Ibid.

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A
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Concerning a
Death-bed Repentance.

TIS the faint Dictate even
of Natural Reason, but
the more clear and full
Discovery of Revelation,
That when we die, when our Souls
shall be separated from our Bodies,
when we leave this World, we shall
not then perish like the Brutes, and
cease to be; but shall subsist and conti-
nue in another State and Capacity, ei-
ther of Happiness or Misery, to all E-
ternity. And we are further instru-
cted from Divine Revelation in the
Holy Scriptures, That this present Life,
this short and uncertain time of con-

tinuance in this World, is the only space of Probation and Trial, to fit and prepare us for our future Eternal State.

As the Tree falls, so it lies. There is no Work nor Repentance in the Grave. But as Death shall seize us, in the same Capacity we shall appear before the Throne of God, and shall then be disposed of in an irreversibile unalterable State, either of Happiness or Misery.

Those who make their own Will their Law, and who are guided and acted by their own vicious sensual Inclinations, they shall be eternally miserable. Or according to our blunt way of expressing it in our *English* Language, They shall be *Damned*, that is, they shall be condemned to that state of Misery, which the Justice of God hath prepared to be the sad Lot and Portion of all impenitent Sinners.

But on the other hand ; Those who follow the Divine Conduct, and are obedient to the Laws of the Gospel ; such Persons, through the Mercy of God, and the Merits of Jesus Christ, shall be saved and preserved from the
Wrath

Wrath to come. And shall be placed in that happy State and Capacity, where they shall not only be freed from Misery, but shall further be secured in the unalterable enjoyment of an unexpressible Happiness and Satisfaction.

From these Considerations you are fully convinced, that it is both your Interest and Duty to take care of your Souls, and provide for Eternity. But the sad mistake is this, (and it is the ruin of thousands) you fancy it is time enough hereafter to entertain such Thoughts. “ You have so much
 “ Diversion and Employment in the
 “ World, that you have little or no
 “ time for the Duties of Religion. But
 “ when you have settled your Affairs,
 “ and dispatched *this* or *that* : When
 “ you have improved or cleared your
 “ Estates : When you have taken in
 “ this Mortgage, finished that Purchase, &c. When the hurry of these
 “ things is over, and that you can call
 “ your Thoughts your own, *then* you
 “ promise your selves to be very Religious,

" gious; that is, when you have done
 " with this World, you will provide
 " for the next. When your Bodies be-
 " gin to be crazy, and your strength
 " to decay; When you are laid upon
 " a Sick bed, and have lost the relish
 " of sensual Pleasures, then you fancy
 " you shall have both leisure and in-
 " clination to repent of your Sins,
 " and to beg Pardon for them. And
 " whenever you do repent, (tho' it
 " be but upon your Death-bed) God,
 " who is very merciful, hath promi-
 " sed to accept you.

I appeal now to your own Consci-
 ences if this is not the very Language
 of your hearts: But know, that your
 hearts are deceitful, and take heed
 lest they be further hardened through
 the deceitfulness of Sin.

That I may therefore awaken your
 Consideration, and convince you of
 your danger in trusting to a broken
 Reed: That I may make you sensible
 how unsafe it is to depend upon a
Death-bed Repentance, I shall very di-
 stinctly examine that matter. By shew-
 ing,

I. *What*

1. *What is meant by true Repentance?*
 2. I shall enquire, *How far, and in what manner a Sick and Dying Sinner can be able to Repent?*

3. I shall desire such Persons sadly to consider, *What small hope there is, that such kind of Repentance should find acceptance with God.*

4. I shall examine those *Two* noted Scripture-instances commonly mentioned in favour of a Death-bed Repentance, *viz. The Labourers in the Vineyard, who came in at the eleventh hour. And, The Thief upon the Cross.*

But as Preparatory to my enlargement on these Particulars, whereby it will be more distinct and instructive; I must *first* premise, what is meant by a Death-bed Repentance.

Now a Death-bed Repentance denotes *Two* things.

1. A finishing that great Work of Repentance which we begun in our Healths, and took some care to carry on amidst the Business and Diversions of this World; But do now more solemnly compleat at our Deaths, by review-

viewing the State of our souls, and perfecting our Accounts with God.

This kind of Death-bed Repentance is so far from being a mistake, that it is a necessary Duty, and is the commendable practice of good and pious Men. But,

2. There is a Vulgar Notion of a Death-bed Repentance, *viz.*

“ When a Man then begins to Re-
 “ pent when he comes to die. When
 “ a Man hath spent all his Life in the
 “ gratifying of his Lusts, and hath fol-
 “ lowed his own vicious Inclinations.
 “ When he hath denied himself no
 “ carnal Satisfactions, but hath taken
 “ his fill of sensual Pleasures : And yet
 “ such a Man, when his Body is disa-
 “ bled, and Death approacheth, so
 “ that he hath neither time nor incli-
 “ nation to Sin any longer, will pretend
 “ to be sorry for his Sin, and Repent.
 This we call a Death-bed Repentance.

Now how *unsafe* and *uncomfortable* such a Death-bed Repentance is, I shall endeavour to convince you, by examining the forementioned Particulars.

I. *What*

I. *What is meant by true Repentance.*

The vulgar and common Notion of Repentance, is evidently this:

When a Man hath committed a fault, and hath done something amiss, and is then sorry for it; is grieved and troubled that he hath done it, and doth heartily wish it had not been done. Such a Man, we usually say, doth Repent of such an Action.

But this is not the full adequate Notion of a Gospel-Repentance; of such a Repentance as shall find acceptance with God.

This is but the Repentance of Malefactors at the Gallows; nay, it is no other than the Repentance of *Cain* and *Judas*.

It is observed, That the most profligate condemned Wretch when he comes to die, will be very sorry for what he hath done. He will be much ashamed, and will have great Indignation against himself, to think he should be such a fool to part with his precious Life, and all the Comforts and Satisfaction of this World, in such a vile ignominious manner, to be tied up like
a Dog,

a Dog, perhaps for the taking of a few Sheep. How will such a fellow fawn upon, and flatter the Judge, *That if he will but spare him, O what an honest Man he will then be!* And yet do but procure his Pardon, and let him loose, and he is quickly at the old Trade. Nay, 'tis great odds but you have him again by the next Assizes.

Now will any one pretend that in such a Case as this, there is true Repentance?

Which yet is more evident from those Scripture-Instances of *Cain* and *Judas*.

It seems very probable, from the circumstances of his Story, that *Cain* did repent of the Murther of his Brother. *My punishment, saith he, is greater than I can bear,* Gen. 4. 13. But because in the Judgment of some Learned Men, this is rather an instance of Despair than Repenting Sorrow; I shall not much insist upon this of *Cain*. But as to the other instance of *Judas*, 'tis express and undeniable.

You

You read his Story, Matth. 27. 3, 4, 5. *Then Judas which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief Priests and Elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent Blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the Temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.*

Here are as signal Instances that *Judas* did sincerely repent of what he had done, as can possibly be given. For besides the express Testimony of the Holy Ghost, which in plain terms tells us he did Repent, and that he himself declared, *He had sinned in betraying the innocent Blood*: He further gives this evidence, that he was in earnest, he not only restores the *thirty* pieces, but in horror and consternation of Mind, *he went and hanged himself.*

Here is, I say, in this instance as much Grief, and Trouble, and Vexation for the Commission of a Sin, and as noted evidence that he was heartily sorry

sorry for it, as can possibly be supposed. And yet 'tis as plain, that this Repentance of *Judas* was not an Evangelical Repentance, such a Repentance as was accepted by Almighty God. Our Blessed Saviour, who is Truth it self, having passed this Decree upon him: *Wo unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed: it had been good for that man, if he had not been born,* Matth. 26. 24.

It appears from these premises, that there is more required to a saving Gospel-Repentance than trouble of Mind. *When a Man hath committed a fault, he may be sorry for it, he may grieve and mourn that he hath done it: he may heartily wish it had not been done; he may make Restitution of his ill gotten Goods.* All this may be done; thus far he may proceed, and yet his Repentance is but imperfect, and shall never find acceptance with a pure and holy God.

But here you will say;

If Men may proceed thus far, and yet their Repentance is not true and saving; How shall we know that we have true Repentance; and wherein doth the nature of it consist? To

To this I answer,

God only can instruct us what is true Repentance. That is, it is very agreeable to the Majesty and Sovereignty of God to prescribe the Terms and Conditions of Salvation, and to appoint his Creatures what they must do; how they must behave themselves to be accepted by him.

Now there is no other way to be informed in this matter, but to consult the Holy Scriptures. In those Sacred Writings, the Divine Wisdom hath sufficiently revealed his Will, and hath plainly told us, *What it is that he required of us; and what we are to do, that we may inherit Eternal Life.*

We are expressly admonished, *That without holiness, no man shall see the Lord,* Heb. 12. 14. *That the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God,* 1 Cor. 6. 9, 10. *If ye live after*
the

the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the Body ye shall live, Rom. 8. 13. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption: but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting, Gal. 6. 7, 8. For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works, Matth. 16 27. And the Son of God being made perfect, he became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him, Heb. 5. 9. And St. Paul doth plainly admonish us, That the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 Thes. 1. 7, 8.

From these places of Scripture (to omit many others) it evidently appears, *That actual Holiness, and actual Obedience to the Laws of the Gospel is the indispensable Condition of Salvation. And consequently to be only Sorry for our Sins;*

Sins ; to be troubled that we have done amiss ; unless this Sorrow do bring forth fruits meet for Repentance ; that is, unless it be attended with actual Reformation and Amendment, it is not a true and Evangelical Repentance, such a Repentance as God hath promised to accept.

2. I am to examine, *How far, and in what manner a Sick and Dying Sinner can be able to Repent ?*

And this I shall best perform by a plain representation of matter of Fact: Whilst I faithfully remind you, how, or in what manner you may happen to die.

1. *You may die suddenly.*

This hath been many a Man's case, and you have no assurance to the contrary, but it may be yours. If some hidden Distemper do not thus extinguish the Lamp of Life, your own Sin and Folly may then puff it out. You may happen in some private Quarrel, unexpectedly to die at the point of a Sword, and so may fall a Sacrifice to your Lust, to your Malice, or Revenge.

venge. But whatever may occasion your Death ; if it be sudden, it is then impossible for you to Repent upon your Death-beds. And if you have not taken care in your life-time to perform that great Work, then according to the Laws of the Gospel, you are utterly lost and undone for ever. *For except ye repent ; ye shall all likewise perish.*

2. *You may die raving Mad, or stupidly Senseless.*

There is a sufficient Mass of vicious corrupted Humours, or (as Physicians phrase it) of Morbifick Matter in any of your Bodies, as may occasion these sad Symptoms and dismal Effects. And if this be your case, where then is your Death-bed Repentance ?

It is necessary to Repentance (even in the vulgar Notion of it) that you should not only remember your Sins, but should also be sorry for them. But now supposing your Distemper is either a *Frenzy* or a *Lethargy*, or in any other instance of such a nature, as shall wholly deprive you of your Memory
and

and Understanding, your Repentance is then impossible. But,

3. Supposing it is neither *thus* nor *thus* with you ; but that God in his Mercy gives you a slow and easie passage out of this World. Suppose your Distemper is so gentle, that it neither distracts you with Pain, nor disorders your Faculties; but that, as we phrase it, *You have your Senses to the last*. In such a case as this (which is the most favourable that can be supposed) I will now examine, how far any Man who hath spent the time of his Health in Sin and Vanity, can be able to Repent.

1. *Wicked men when they come to die, may remember their Sins, which they seldom think on in the time of their Healths.*

The generality of men are so wholly taken up with the Designs of this World, that they have neither leisure nor inclination to think of the Next. In what a hurry such men do spend the Day, is very obvious to observe ; and at Night, being loaden with Wine and Business, they sleep over their Cares and their Sins together. But

16 *Of a Death-bed*

But when some lingering Disease shall confine them to their Chambers, or nail them to their Beds; when their Sleep is departed from them, and that they lie rowling and tumbling, and wishing for the Day: Then they are at leisure to consider their Ways, and to remember what they have done, and to recollect the former Passages of their Lives.

2. *Wicked men when they come to die, may not only remember, but also may be very sorry, and much troubled for their Sins; and may likewise make a penitent Confession of them.*

This evidently appears from the former Instance of *Judas*, who was not a little troubled for betraying his Master; and as freely makes confession of his Fault: *I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent Blood.*

And this is undeniable even from daily observation: Those who visit Sick-beds, and hear the dying Groans of departing Sinners, are best able to tell you how they will lament their former Lives, and what wretched Sinners they have been. And at such a time

time they will be very free and ingenuous in their Confession, with *a thus*, and *thus* have I done; and with all they may mightily judge and condemn themselves for it.

If ever you have been laid upon a Sick-Bed, with the Terrors and Apprehensions of another World before you, then I appeal to your own experience for the truth of what I have now said.

3 Wicked men, upon their Death-Beds, may not only make a sorrowful Confession of their Sins, but also they may earnestly beg Pardon for them

There is a Principle of Self-preservation in the most vicious carnal man, which prompts him to be solicitous for deliverance from an imminent Danger. A noted Instance of this you have in Seamen; such men (especially the common Sailors) are not usually over-zealous in Religion, and yet in a dangerous Storm, or in a leaky sinking Ship, those who seldom named God, unless in Oaths and Execrations, will now fall to their Prayers.

B

And

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B

And

And thus the most graceless, sensual, worldly Person, when he comes to die, and hath the prospect of another World immediately before him; when he sees the Infernal Pit open to receive him, O with what earnestness will he deprecate the Divine Vengeance! How passionately will he pray unto God to spare him, to be gracious to him, to pardon and forgive him!

Nay, even those who have been so careless and unconcerned, that they could never in their whole life-time be persuaded to remember our Blessed Saviour's Passion in the way of his own Institution in the Holy Sacrament; yet these very Persons on their Death-bed will pretend to remember it. They will then plead his Merits and Satisfaction, and will beg God's Pardon for the sake of Jesus Christ.

This likewise, as to matter of Fact, is undeniably evident.

4. *Wicked Men, when they come to die, may further make very serious Resolutions of amendment of Life.* And in such cases this is the noted Language of a Death-bed.

“ O

“ O what a wicked Wretch have I
 “ been? I have done *thus* and *thus*. But
 “ if God will now please to spare my
 “ Life, and restore me to my Health,
 “ I’ll become a new Man. I’ll no more
 “ be guilty of such Intemperance. I’ll
 “ be wanton and lascivious no more.
 “ I’ll take heed of lying and slandering:
 “ And I’ll refrain from this cursing and
 “ swearing. I’ll be more careful to san-
 “ ctify the Sabbath. I’ll not only fre-
 “ quent the Church, but for the fu-
 “ ture I’ll no more be guilty of vain
 “ Sports and Pastimes on the Lord’s-
 “ day. And on the Week-day, tho’ I
 “ must follow my worldly Business, yet
 “ I’ll do it in dependance upon God’s
 “ Providence, I will never more neg-
 “ lect to pray unto God; but do now
 “ resolve Morning and Evening to
 “ bend my Knees to my Creator and
 “ Redeemer.

Lastly, As an evidence that he is sin-
 cere, *He may make Restitution and Sa-*
tisfaction in several instances.

He may declare that he bears no Ma-
 lice, but doth freely forgive all the

World. He may likewise restore his ill-gotten Goods; and may give satisfaction to those he remembers to have wronged.

And not only so, but for the close of all, he may be large in his Charity in Reversion; and by his last Will and Testament may bequeath a bountiful Legacy to the Poor.

All this may be done, and it is the utmost that can be done upon a Death-bed.

3. Let us now impartially examine, *Whether all this will amount to true Repentance?* Such a Repentance as shall find acceptance with a Pure and Holy God.

I. *Wicked Men when they come to die may remember their Sins.*

But such remembrance being no other than the exercise of a natural Faculty, is neither Repentance, nor any part of that Saving-work. The vilest Wretches do but too much remember their Sins, and please themselves in that Carnal satisfaction they had in the enjoyment of them.

But,

Repentance.

21

But, you will say, this is not the Case. For such a dying Sinner doth not barely remember his Sins, but he remembers them with Shame and Sorrow, and is much troubled for the committing of them. *And this Trouble, and Sorrow, and Compunction of Mind, we hope will be accepted as true Repentance.*

To this I answer.

Such a dying Sinner is indeed very much troubled, and is under great anguish and perplexity of Mind. But let us now strictly examine what's the occasion of all this Consternation? Is he sorry that he hath offended God, that he hath transgressed the Laws of so gracious a Majesty; This pretence is not probable, when we reflect upon his former Conversation. He who made his own Will his Law, and never denied himself in any Carnal Enjoyment; and tho' God himself in his holy Word hath expressly declared, that *such* and *such* things ought not to be done; yet because of some present Pleasure and Profit he is resolved to

commit them. He who was not only pleased with his Sin, but gloried in his Sin, and boasted in his Sin; 'tis very unaccountable, that such a Man all on the sudden should be thus sorry for his Sin. 'Tis strange that his Judgment and Apprehension of things should be thus changed in a moment.

For his Conviction, I'll suppose him to be restored to his former Health and Vigour, and that the former Passages of his Life, in any instance, could be repeated. Being under such pleasing Circumstances, can he then honestly and conscientiously make this Exposition of *Joseph*, *How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*

'Tis true, the Man is now troubled; but for what? 'Tis not for his Sin, (which he never had any Quarrel against) but in plain terms, it is for the punishment of his Sin.

He is indeed thus far troubled for his Sin. He is very much out of Humour that he can Sin no longer; that he hath lost his relish and inclination to it. It makes him heavy and lumpsish,

fish, that all his pleasant Days are pass'd and gone; and that nothing now remains but a sad Reckoning and Account. *Rejoyce, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.* 'Tis this Judgment, this Reckoning and Account that makes him quake and tremble.

When a poor dying Wretch, who hath neglected God and his Duty all his life long, shall be now convinced by the decays of Nature, that his Soul must immediately be torn from his Body: When he looks upward, and there beholds a just Judge ready to pronounce a sad Sentence upon him: When he casts his Eye downward, and there observes that place of Horror, that flaming Furnace just ready to receive him; When he now sees and considers these things, which formerly in the days of his Vanity he had no leisure to think on; and further

reflects, that all this Misery is now brought upon him by his own folly, and that with a very little care and forecast it might have been prevented. Being under such sad Circumstances as these, 'tis but a natural Love of a Man's self; 'tis no other than an instance of Self-preservation to be troubled and perplexed. In plain terms, This anguish of Mind for the Happiness that is lost, and the Torments that shall be endured, is the very Worm of the Damned that dieth not. And if such Sorrow and Vexation as this is true Repentance, then those miserable Creatures shall sadly repent to all Eternity. But,

2. The dying Person is not only sorry for his Sin, but also makes confession of it, and very humbly begs Pardon for the sake of Jesus Christ. And will not this be accepted as true Repentance?

I answer.

We are indeed assured by St. John, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,* 1 John 1. 9. But what kind of Confession shall be ac-

accepted, the Holy Scriptures must inform us.

In these Sacred Writings we are often admonished, that it is not an *Historical Confession*; 'tis not a bare acknowledgment that we have done *thus* or *thus*; but it is a Penitential Confession shall find acceptance. *Who so confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall find mercy*, Prov. 28. 13. A sick dying Man may indeed confess his Sins; but how far he can be able to forsake his Sin, that is, to amend and reform, shall be considered in its proper place.

But you will say, *He not only confesseth, but he begs pardon for the sake of Jesus Christ*; and we have a gracious promise that at such a time we shall be heard, *Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me*, Psalm. 50. 15. And our Blessed Saviour hath assured us, *Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you*, John 16. 23. Now here is a poor languishing Creature in great distress and trouble, and will not God accept him for the sake of Jesus Christ?

I answer ;

All the Promises of God in Jesus Christ are *Yea* and *Amen*, that is, most sure and certain. But then you must also know, these Promises are conditional, and the performance of them on God's part, doth suppose certain Qualifications and Conditions on our part. *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness of the flesh and Spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God,* 2 Cor. 7. 1. intimating, that unless we cleanse our selves from all filthiness, and do thus perfect Holiness, we have no title to these Promises.

Indeed Jesus Christ hath promised, *those that come unto him, he will in no wise cast them out, but will kindly receive them, and treat them as Friends.* But upon what terms he will receive them, and own them as Friends, he himself hath told us in these words. *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you,* John 15. 14. *And being made perfect, he became the Author of eternal Salvation unto all them that obey him,* Heb. 5. 9.

I have now shewed you, that actual Holiness, or actual Obedience (which are one and the same thing) is the Gospel-condition of Salvation. And if you can make it appear, that a Man who in the time of his Health was so far from the practice of Religion, that he contemned and despised it, nay, perhaps ridiculed and burlesqu'd it: If, I say, such a Man when he is laid upon a Sick-bed, and is able to do nothing else, can obey the Laws of the Gospel, and walk in the ways of God's Commandments, then indeed you say something; otherwise here is, as yet, but very slender encouragement for a Death-bed Repentance. But,

3. We suppose further, *That the dying Person makes very serious and passionate Resolutions of amendment of Life. And will not the Mercy of God accept these Resolutions? In such a Case will not he take the Will for the Deed?*

To this I answer;

That when Men are in a great fright, and are under the apprehensions

ons of some imminent Danger, 'tis then the most common thing in the World to make Resolutions. What will not such Men promise, if they may but escape such and such a Danger ! The Vows of Mariners and Seamen in a violent Storm, are a noted instance of such Resolutions.

Let us now strictly examine, Whether, or how far, God will accept such dying Resolutions ?

To state this Matter truly, you must observe, That Religion is represented in the Gospel as our reasonable or rational Service, and consequently that the exercise of it must proceed from Judgment and Deliberation, not from sudden Heats and Passion. We are admonished by the wise man, *Not to offer to God the sacrifice of fools* ; but when we make a vow or promise to him, deliberately to consider how far, or in what manner we can be able to perform it.

Now there are *Two* Things to be consider'd in a dying Sinner's Resolution, *Sincerity* and *Ability*. Sincerity
in

in his *Intentions*, and Ability in his *Executions*.

And *first*, it is not likely that a dying Sinner's *Intention* should be sincere; but that he may promise what he never intends to perform. Such a Wretch who hath so far corrupted his Morals, may by the just Judgment of God be depraved in his understanding, and may vainly imagine that God is such a one as himself. And because he observes that frail Men have been often cheated by him, and have really believed him, whilst he made Promises and Protestations of what he never intended; he is so foolish as to fancy, that an Omniscient God may be likewise thus imposed on. And therefore he will be as large and as passionate in his Promises of Reformation, as the most notorious Malefactor ever was in hopes of Pardon. Whereas should God restore him to his former Health and Vigour, he would then be as *Loose* and *Profane*, as *Lustful* and *Intemperate*, as *Envious* and *Malicious*, as *Covetous* and *Worldly*, as ever he was before. We should then
quickly

quickly have him at his old Cant: *The charms of beauty and good company are not to be resisted. God forgive me, I am so used to this swearing, I rap out an Oath before I think on't. And I am naturally so passionate, I see I cannot help it. But be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap, Gal. 6. 7.*

But suppose the dying Sinner were sincere, and did really intend that Reformation which is now so solemnly promised; let him sadly consider, how unlikely it is he should be able to perform all this.

For his Conviction, I must remind him;

There are *Two* things necessary to all great Undertakings. *Ability* and *Opportunity*.

I. As to *Ability*; How difficult, if not impossible, it is for a sick and dying Sinner to reform his Nature, if ever it hath been your own case, you yourselves will be easily convinced. When a man is oppressed with Pain, disturb'd with Visits, distracted with the Clamours.

mours of his dissatisfied Relations: Amidst all this noise and diversion, What can possibly be done? what Duties can be performed? Do but seriously think upon it, and your own Apprehensions will excuse my enlargement.

But supposing he had the greatest Capacity, pray, what time is now left him to perfect so vast a Work? Evil Habits which have been long in contracting, are not suddenly rooted out. When Lusts and Passions (by being often indulged) are grown rampant, they are not easily mortified. A thorough Reformation is a work of time, and must be done successively, and by degrees. This is fully intimated whilst we are admonished *to go on to perfection. And to grow in grace.*

But what can that man do who is now a dying? When the Sentence of Death is passed upon him, and his Physician hath given him over? To talk then of reforming his Life, when he now finds he can live no longer, is such an intolerable piece of weakness, as in any other instance would scarce be heard with patience. .

Supr.

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Suppose a dying Father, who had ruined his Family by his Extravagant Courses, should thus comfort his dejected, impoverished Children;

Be of good chear, I am now resolved to be very frugal. I'll provide for you, and get you a good Estate.

Pray, what could be replied in such a Case?

Alas, Sir, you're a dying. You cannot lift your head off the Pillow. You cannot live till the morning. And how should you get us an Estate? To tell them further, Ay, but I resolve it, and I hope you believe me.

Such Resolution would be but mean Satisfaction; and a very slender supply of all their Wants.

The Application is easy, and pray make it effectually to your selves. In short; Promises and Resolutions are not Performances. Nor were ever so accepted by God or Man. But you will say;

4. He actually, thus far, performs his Promises and Resolutions, that he makes Restitution, and that in several Instances.

Will

Will not this be accepted as true Repentance?

To this I Answer,

That as *Restitution* is a most necessary Duty, to which all injurious Offenders are strictly obliged; so it is the surest Expedient to satisfy the Conscience, and to convince both our selves and others of the truth and sincerity of our Repentance.

But upon a strict inquiry it will appear, how difficult it is for a dying Person to make such *Restitution*.

For his Conviction I must remind him: That the word *Restitution*, in its Latitude, denotes *Two* Things.

1. *The being reconciled to the Person whom we have offended.*

2. *The giving him Satisfaction and Reparation for the Damage hath been done him.*

To explain this further, we are to observe; That in Sins against the *Second* Table, there is not only an Act of Disobedience towards God, but also of affront and injury against our Brother. And he who truly repents,
in

in both these instances will cancel and undo, and take away his Sin as far as possible.

Let us now examine, how far both these can be done by a dying Person.

1. The dying Sinner pretends to be reconciled to those whom he hath offended " He declares, He is very sorry for the envy and hatred, the rancour and malice he hath been guilty of; And assures his Neighbour he is now very real, and desires that what is past, may be forgiven and forgotten mutually on both sides. He is heartily troubled that he hath ever done him any wrong, and desires *him* to forgive him; and withal assures him, that he himself doth now forgive *him* and all the World, as he expects to be forgiven for Christ's sake.

All this is plausible and seemingly pious. But let me thus expostulate with this dying Sinner.

You say, you are now sorry for the Wrongs and Injuries you have done to such and such Persons. Let me ask you this short Question.

Are

Are you now able to affront them any longer? Is it in your power to do them further mischief? Is not your Malice now bridled, is not your Rancour limited and restrained?

For your Conviction pray resolve me;

You say, you do now forgive. But were you thus ready to forgive in the days of your Health and Vigour? Did not you then, on all occasions, express your resentments to the utmost? Did not you then gratify your Spleen, and take the pleasure of Revenge when it lay in your power? What reason is there now to believe you, whilst you protest you do forgive him?

You say, you forgive him, because you do not hurt him. You do not hurt him, because you cannot.

Again, You say, you forgive him. But what hypocrisy is this, to pretend to forgive, when you have had your Revenge already, and that to the utmost, at least as far, as your own safety, and respect to the Laws would permit you to take it.

I'll explain this further to you, in this following Case.

An insulting *Mahometan* confines his poor innocent *Christian* Slave in a noysome Dungeon, where with bad Air, and worse usage, the poor Man's heart is broke. And being told, that he is dying, he pretends to be merciful, and gives order for his release. But what a cheat is this, to say he doth release him, when he can keep him no longer? God hath released him. For in the Grave, *the weary be at rest*. There *the prisoners rest together, they hear not the voice of the oppressor*, Job 3.17,18.

By the light of this example you will easily understand the value and acceptance of a Death-bed forgiveness.

And just at the same rate,

2. The dying Sinner makes Reparation and Satisfaction.

“ He is convinced that he hath injured such a Man, having wronged him
 “ in his Dealings to such a value ; And
 “ is now not only sorry for the injury,
 “ but is also ready to make him satisfaction. *And is not this sufficient evidence*
 “ *of the sincerity of his Repentance ?* An-

Answer ;

It is indeed very pleasing to God, that those who have been wronged by you, should receive satisfaction for the Wrongs you have done them. And if this Reparation is not made by you in Person, it must then be made by your Heirs in Reversion. But withal you must be reminded ; that though what is paid and satisfied by your Heirs, may in the sense of the Law be called your payment ; yet I much question, whether in the sight of God it will be so accepted.

For to state the Case fairly.

You are now ready to part with your Estate, and to distribute it in proportion to those you have wronged. But, pray, who thanks you for this ; To bequeath your Estate when you can keep it no longer ? *Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee : then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ?* Luke 12. 20. That is, they are then none of thine. So that Satisfaction in Reversion is not thine, but thy Heirs. And he who thus
makes

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makes Restitution, he only pays his old Scores, by drawing a Bill upon his Executors.

I have now distinctly examin'd what it is that a dying Sinner can be able to perform in order to Repentance. As also what small hope there is, that such kind of Repentance should be accepted by a pure and holy God.

A man may remember his Sins; He may be sorry for his Sins; He may confess his Sins; He may beg Pardon for his Sins, with firm Resolutions of Amendment; nay, He may make actual Restitution to those he hath wrong'd, and yet may be rejected.

But you will say,

This is very harsh and uncomfortable Doctrine; and we can scarce think that you your self will be so severe and ill-natur'd, as to practise accordingly. When you visit Sick-beds, and hear a poor Dying Creature to lament his Sins with Tears, and most earnestly beg Pardon for the sake of Jesus Christ: When you observe how passionately he resolves, *That if God will*
but

but spare him, he'll become a new man, and never more be guilty of such extravagance:

What do you say or do in such a Case? Nay, what must such a wicked man do, who having lived a vicious Life, shall thus happen to be surprized by Death?

Dare you be so uncharitable as to pass the Decree upon him, and say, *That he is past hope: There's no remedy, but he is certainly damned?*

Answer;

I dare not presume to limit the *Holy One*, whose Mercies are Infinite. In such a Case I will not censure, but admonish and instruct. I will exhort the dying Sinner to remember his Sins; to bewail his Sins; to beg Pardon for his Sins; to make firm Resolutions of Amendment; and where there is occasion, to make Restitution. And having prayed earnestly for him, and commended him to God's Mercy, *Do I then say, Such a one shall be damned? No; I dare not. But do I say he shall be saved? No, I cannot. What then do*

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I resolve? What do I determine in this matter? I will be silent, and determine nothing. For as I dare not flatter him into a false and groundless Presumption, so neither would I sink him into the horror of Despair. I say, I will determine nothing; *I will judge nothing before the time.* All that I can do, in this dark, intricate Case, is to
 “ commend him to the Extraordinary
 “ Mercy of God, to which we must leave
 “ some great Cases, not knowing what to
 “ judge of them our selves. Possibly, God,
 “ who will have mercy on whom he
 “ will have mercy, may please to let this
 “ Dying Sinner be a signal Example of
 “ his Unlimited Power and Prerogative,
 “ to save beyond all ordinary Rules.

Whether it may be *thus*, or *thus*, I dare not determine. What God can do, *ex plenitudine Potestates*, or by his Prerogative, is not for us to dispute. However, I must be so faithful to my Office, as to admonish this dying Sinner, That the Gospel, by the Laws of which we must be judged, doth expressly declare, *That actual Holiness,*
and

and actual Obedience, are the necessary Conditions of Salvation. When therefore a man hath been vicious and extravagant all his Life long, if God doth accept his dying Resolutions, 'tis more than he hath promised. And 'tis more than he hath given us Authority to Preach and Declare.

But are we not told in the Gospel That the Labourers were rewarded who came into the Vineyard at the Eleventh Hour? And that the Thief upon the Cross was received into Paradise? And are not these Two Examples sufficient for a Death bed Repentance?

I Answer:

'Tis very deplorable, what slight, trifling Pretences, what thin, fig-leaf Excuses some men will make for the neglect of their Duty. As, in particular, may appear by a strict Examination of these Two Instances.

I. *Of the Labourers in the Vineyard.*

THIS being a Parable, is to be interpreted as all other Parables ought to be.

'Tis a Rule among the Schoolmen, *Theologia Symbolica non est Argumentativa*; that is, Arguments are not to be drawn from the particular Circumstances of Parables, but only from the chief Scope and Design of them.

Now when you have observed the Scope and Design of this Parable, (which you read, *Matth. 20.*) you will then easily be convinced, what slender encouragement it gives for a Death-bed Repentance.

The Story is this :

“ A Master of a Family hires a Com-
 “ pany of Workmen to dig in his Vine-
 “ yard. Some he hires early in the
 “ Morning, and bargains to give them
 “ a Penny a day for their Labour. About
 “ the Third hour, (which answers to
 “ our Nine in the Morning) as also at
 “ the Sixth hour, (which is our Twelve
 “ at

“ at Noon) and at the *Ninth* hour,
“ (which is our *Three* in the Afternoon.)
“ he hires more Labourers with this
“ condition, *Whatsoever is right, I will*
“ *give you*, that is, I will not bind my
“ self to give you the Wages of a whole
“ Day for working part of it; but ac-
“ cording as you behave your selves, I
“ will reward you.

“ At the *Eleventh* hour (which is
“ about our *Five* in the Evening) he
“ takes *in* more Workmen upon the
“ same terms. And at Night he gives
“ them their Wages, and pays them all
“ alike. And tho’ some of them were
“ discontented at this sort of Distribu-
“ tion, and thought it unequal, that
“ those who had workt but one single
“ hour, should be paid as largely as they
“ who had sweat for it all the Day, yet
“ they were quickly silenced by being
“ told, *Friend, I do thee no wrong*, that is,
“ they had their Bargain. And what
“ reason had they to envy and murmur,
“ if either to encourage Industry, or to
“ expresse his own Bounty, he had given
“ to these *last*, as unto them who were
“ *first*?

This is the Parable. The Interpretation of which, the meanest Capacity will thus easily comprehend.

Almighty God, the great Householder, calls several Labourers, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, into his Vineyard, the Church. At several hours of the Day, that is, in different Ages of the World, and at several times of mens Lives. Those who came in at the *Eleventh* hour, that is, in the declining part of their Lives, they had their reward of Glory, as well as those who came in at the first.

From which Parable some Persons have made this Inference.

That tho' a Man may have loiter'd all the Day, and wasted the time of his Life in Sin and Vanity, yet if he comes *in* at the *Eleventh* hour, that is, if he Repents, and is sorry for his Sin at his Death, God will then both accept and reward him.

But this is a very gross and fatal mistake, and it is the greatest Charity to make Men sensible of it.

Now

Now in order to ~~such~~ Mens Conviction, I shall desire them to consider,

1. They who came in at the *Eleventh* hour, they came in and work'd as soon as they were called. Had they been called sooner, they would have work'd sooner. Had they been called at the *Ninth* hour, they would have work'd from the *Ninth* hour. Had they been called at the *Sixth* hour, they would have work'd from the *Sixth* hour. Had they been called early in the Morning, they would have work'd from that time. This being the very reason they gave for their Idleness, viz. *No man hath hired us.*

But what is this to the Case of a dying Sinner now under the Gospel? Who was called upon, and invited to work, not only at the *Eleventh* hour, or at the *Ninth* hour, or at the *Sixth* hour, but early in the Morning, even in the very beginning of his Life; from his Childhood, in the dawning of the Day, he was called to this State of Salvation. But he obstinately refused to work, and resisted the ma-

ny Calls and ~~Invitations~~ of God, and slighted the Warnings and Admonitions of his Ministers. He wasted his Time, and squander'd his Days in Idleness and Luxury; and being now come to the period of his Life, he only begs pardon for not working. I say, What pretence of comfort can he frame from this Parable, that God will reward him only for *Wishings* and *Wouldings* at the last Gasps? But,

2. Those Labourers who came into the Vineyard at the *Eleventh* hour, tho' indeed they came *in* late, yet they work'd *one* hour, and they continued labouring to the close of the Day. But had they staid to the *Twelfth* hour, when working was over, and should thus make their Confession to the Steward: *Sir, 'tis true, you hired us in the Morning, and we promised you to come and work. But so it happens, we have been idling, and loitering, and diverting our selves all the Day. However we are now sorry for it, and hope you will pass it by, and give us our Wages amongst the rest.*

Pray,

Pray, what answer would he make to such Men as these?

This is the very Case of a Death-bed Repentance. For the dying Sinner doth not so much as come in at the *Eleventh* hour, but stays till the *Twelfth*; till *Night cometh, when no man can work*. He hath been trifling and loitering, revelling and caressing all the time of his Life, and now expects at his Death that God should reward him because the Labourers in the Vineyard, who came not in till the *Eleventh* hour, did receive their Wages equal with the first. But, I say, how great a cheat he puts upon himself in this comparison, will easily appear from these premises to any considering Person.

'Tis true, Those who came in at the *Eleventh* hour they had their Wages, for they did work *one* hour. But what then? *Therefore* those shall be rewarded who did not work at all. This is indeed the noted Logick of a dying Sinner. But the Inference is too trifling to deserve a Confutation.

The *Second* Instance commonly urged in favour of a *Death-bed Repen-*
tance, is

The Thief upon the Cross.

YOU read his Story, *Luke 23.*
from *Verse 39.* “ Our Blessed Sa-
“ vour being crucified between two
“ Thieves, One of them railed on him,
“ saying, if thou be Christ, save thyself
“ and us. As if he had said, If thou
“ art what thou pretendest to be, a
“ Christ, a Saviour, if thou art not a
“ Cheat and Impostor, save thyself and
“ us. But the other answering, rebuked
“ him, saying, Dost not thou fear God,
“ seeing thou art in the same Condemnati-
“ on? And we indeed justly, that is, we
“ were justly condemned, and we just-
“ ly now suffer the Sentence of our
“ Condemnation. For we receive the
“ due reward of our Deeds; but this Man
“ hath done nothing amiss, that is, he is
“ an Innocent Person whom the Jews
“ and Romans do thus barbarously Mur-
“ der. And he said unto Jesus, Lord,
“ re-

“ remember me when thou comest into thy
 “ Kingdom. As if he had said, Tho’
 “ these contemn and revile thee as
 “ mean and despicable, yet I acknow-
 “ ledge thee to be a Great Lord, and
 “ that thou hast a Kingdom to dis-
 “ pose on. And Jesus said unto him,
 “ Verily, I say unto thee, To day shalt
 “ thou be with me in paradise; that is,
 “ immediately after thy Death thou
 “ shalt go to a place of Happiness,
 “ and there abide with me, as a Mem-
 “ ber of that my Kingdom which thou
 “ now askest for.

*This is the Story of the Thief upon the
 Cross.*

From whose Example, Carnal, Li-
 centious Persons do thus encourage
 themselves in their extravagant Pra-
 ctices.

“ We are fully convinced of the ne-
 “ cessity of Repentance. And we do
 “ as fully resolve, some time or other,
 “ to Repent. But why should we be
 “ so forward to disturb our Pleasures,
 “ and neglect our Business as to do it
 “ now, since we may Repent hereafter

“ at better leisure? And tho’ we should
 “ be so far diverted, as not to Repent
 “ till our Death, yet we have here an
 “ encouraging Example we shall then
 “ be accepted. This Thief had been
 “ very notorious and extravagant, an
 “ Offender of the first Rate; and yet
 “ when he calls for Mercy, tho’ it was
 “ with his last Breath, his, *Lord, re-*
 “ *member me when thou comest into thy*
 “ *Kingdom*, was comfortably answered
 “ with a *This day thou shalt be with me*
 “ *in paradise*. And therefore, tho’ the
 “ greatest part of our Lives, like this
 “ Thief’s, may have been spent in Sin
 “ and Vanity, yet if we can but say,
 “ *Lord have mercy upon us*, with our
 “ last Breath, we shall likewise be ac-
 “ cepted.
 To this I

Answer :

‘ **T** I S a dangerous thing to pre-
 sume on God’s Mercy. And
 so provoking is such presumption, that
 if the bare saying of these words, *Lord*
have mercy upon me, would save thy
 Soul; it may so happen, through the
 just

just Judgment of God, thou mayst not be able to do it.

Thou mayest dye suddenly, or thou mayest dye stupid, or raving-mad.

But suppose thou hast both Breath, and the use of thy Reason to say these words, here is very slender encouragement from the Example of this Thief, that a dying Sinner, who never repented till his Death, shall then find Mercy.

For to prove the Validity of a *Death-bed Repentance*, from the Example of this Thief, *Two* things are supposed.

1. *That this Thief was a very wicked Man.*
2. *That he continued in his Sin, and did not repent till the time of his Death.*

Now, if neither of these *Two* can be proved, then the *Crase* of this Thief is not parallel, nor a firm foundation for the Validity of a *Death bed Repentance*.

1. It doth not appear, *That this Thief was a very wicked Man.*

He is called indeed a Thief, and dies as a Malefactor. But now, a good Man, and who is so in the general Course of his Life, may by surprise, and the violence of a Temptation, be guilty of a very bad Action, of which he afterwards doth sincerely Repent. The very Case of *David* and *Peter*. But further he is called indeed a Thief in our Translation; ληστής, in the Greek, *Latro* in the Latin. But what these words do properly signify, we must further examine.

It was the Character of *Barabbas* that he was ληστής, a Robber. So we Translate it, *John* 18. 40. But what kind of Person he was, may be inferred from other places of Scripture.

It is said of this *Barabbas*, That for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, he was cast into prison, *Luke* 23. 19. And *St. Mark* tells us, Chap. 15. Ver. 7 *There was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them, who had made insurrection with him, that is, at his Instigation and Procurement. He was, it's probable, the Ringleader and*
Cap-

Captain of the Rebels. The which conjecture is further confirm'd by the story of this *Barabbas* in St Matth. 27. 16. *They* (that is, the *Jews*) had then a notable prisoner called *Barabbas*; *δισμὸν ἐπίσημον*. Now the word *ἐπίσημον*, signifies an Eminent Person, a Man of Note and Quality.

This *Barabbas* then was the Head of the Party. Who as Zealots for their Nation and Religion, had made a rising against the *Romans*; in which attempt being unsuccessful, they were punished as Malefactors. And yet this *Barabbas*, tho' the Captain-General of a Party, is called, *ἀνδρὶς Λάτρου*, a Thief.

And in Confirmation of this, I must further observe to you, That the word *Λάτρο*, which is now a term of Ignominy and Reproach, and is usually translated, a Thief, or a Robber; did anciently signify no more, as the best Authors inform us, than a hired Souldier. And *Latrocinari pro Militare* is noted Language in *Plautus*.

So that this penitent Thief, as great a Malefactor as he is usually supposed, was

was no worse (for ought we know to the contrary) than a Souldier, who hapning to be on the wrong side, was punished as a Malefactor.

But now supposing,

2. That this Thief had been a very wicked Man; (which is more than was ever yet proved against him) yet, *How do we know that he did not Repent even long before he died?* And if so, if he had formerly repented, then his Case is nothing to the purpose, nor can his Example, with any shew of reason be urged in favour of a Death-bed Repentance.

But supposing,

3. That this Thief was, 1. *A very wicked Man*, not a Souldier, as the word may be rendred, but a *Thief*, and a *Robber*, in the strictest Sense. And supposing, 2. *That he did not Repent till his Death*. Yet I shall shew, *ex abundanti*, that his Example ought not to be urged in favour of a Death-bed Repentance. As will more fully appear by examining the Circumstances of this Thief's Conversion.

1. ¶ *Tis*

1. 'Tis possible he never heard of Christ till his Crucifixion.

If he was a *Gentile*, and not a *few*, 'tis highly probable he never did. For Christ, at first, *was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. And the Commission, *Go, teach all Nations*, was not enlarged till the day of his Ascension. If this was his Case, *How could he believe on him, of whom he had not heard?* So that on this Supposition, no other than a Death-bed Repentance was possible to this Thief.

2. Supposing he had heard of Christ, and that he was informed by common Fame, that there was a Man called *Jesus*, who had done great Miracles: And that several had this opinion of him, That he was the *Messias*, whom God had promised to send into the World: Yet all this was but general and confused knowledge.

He had indeed heard of Christ, and and the several Passages concerning him. But such was the Course of Life this Thief is supposed to have led, that he had no great curiosity to inquire over.

over-strictly into such matters. But when it so happened that he was apprehended for Robbery, and condemned to dye at the same time with Christ; this in all probability made him curious to inquire after him, and to learn all the Circumstances of his Apprehension, Tryal, and Behaviour. From whence he observed so much as convinced him, that he was the true *Messias*. And so he believed on him, and Salvation by him.

But what encouragement is this to thee, O presuming Christian! who was baptized into Christ, and distinctly instructed in the Doctrine of the Gospel, even from thy Child-hood?

Had this Thief, as thou art, been early admitted into the Church; had he then been instructed in his Duty, and constantly admonished to continue in it: And if after such Admission, such Instructions and Exhortations, had he still lived upon the Pad, and spent his time in Roving and Robbing, in Luxury and Injustice; and had rejected the Warnings and Ad-

Admonitions of his Teachers. Had this been his Case, we have then the justest reason to pronounce, That a short Ejaculation at his Death would not have been accepted; and his *Lord remember me*, would have been rejected with a *Depart from me, I know thee not, thou worker of Iniquity.* But,

3. *The Case of this Thief was miraculous and extraordinary.* And that whether we consider the Penitent, or the Grace of God in pardoning.

1. As to the Thief; probably he had lived in great Ignorance, and never had the means of Grace till now. And therefore to profess his Faith in Christ, when he saw him hanging upon the Cross, was very signal and extraordinary.

He confessed Christ when his own Disciples fled from him, and when *Peter* himself denied him. Nay, so great was the Scandal of the Cross, that all Men then forsook him, and lost their Faith in him, and had no further hope of Help and Salvation from him.

Now

Now to confess and own him at such a time as this, was so pleasing and acceptable to our Saviour, that he makes him a signal Instance of his Grace and Favour.

2. It was very agreeable to the Divine Wisdom and Goodness, to do something extraordinary on such a solemn Occasion as this. Thereby to signalize the Efficacy of our Saviour's Mediatorship, and that at such a time, when the Dignity and Glory of his Person was most clouded and obscured.

From these Premises it appears, That this Instance of the Thief upon the Cross, was miraculous and extraordinary. And we have a known Rule, *Extraordinaria non debent esse Exemplar*, Extraordinary Cases are no Rule for practice.

The *Israelites* had Manna showered down from Heaven. Will you therefore leave your Husbandry and expect your Bread from the Clouds?

Will you adventure to leap into the Sea, because you read that *Jonah* was

was saved from thence? Look upon this Thief as a *Jonah* in the Sea; A Miracle of Grace; a Prodigy of Providence.

A King in his Progress passing by the Place of Execution, as an Instance of his Royal Favour, pardons a Thief with the Rope about his Neck; Dare you therefore be encouraged to play the Thief, in hopes of such a strange and unusual Pardon?

And if you dare not thus venture your Life, your Temporal Concern; dare you hazard your Soul, your Eternal Concern?

To conclude.

Our blessed Saviour in pardoning this Thief, in such an extraordinary manner, hath shewed us what he *can* do, that none may Despair. But he hath likewise declared in his Holy Word what he ordinarily *will* do, that none may presume. He hath plainly told us, *That without holiness no man shall see the Lord*, Heb. 12. 14. And that *every one shall receive the things done in his Body,*

Body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad, 2 Cor. 5. 10.

The C L O S E.

I Have now faithfully represented the Uncertainty and Danger of a *Death bed Repentance*. And have plainly admonished you, That if you neglect to Repent *now*, and defer this necessary Work to you know not *when* hereafter, you have just Cause to fear you will *never Repent*. For, either you may be prevented by a sudden stroke, and so your Repentance is impossible; or else disturbed with the Pains and Tortures of a languishing Bed. Which indeed may distract you with Remorse and Anguish, with Horror and Despair; but it is much to be feared without true Repentance.

I do much hope (and do earnestly pray) that what I have now said on this Subject, may make its due Impression upon you. But the more effectually to persuade you, give me
leave

leave to enforce my Admonitions, with the noted words of a truly *Great and Good Man*, now with God.

“ **L** E T no Man deceive you with
 “ vain Words, or with false No-
 “ tions of a flight and sudden Repen-
 “ tance. Do not delude your selves
 “ with vain hopes, that this Work may
 “ be done at any time, and in an in-
 “ stant; and that if you can but fashi-
 “ on your last breath into *Lord have*
 “ *mercy upon me*, this will prevail with
 “ God, and make Atonement for the
 “ long Course of a wicked and sinful
 “ Life.

“ What strange thoughts have Men
 “ of God and Heaven ? As if Heaven
 “ were an *Hospital*, founded on pur-
 “ pose to receive all sick and maimed
 “ Persons; that when they can live
 “ no longer to the Lusts of the Flesh,
 “ and sinful Pleasures of this World,
 “ can but put up a cold and formal
 “ Petition to be admitted there.

“ No, no, as sure as God is true,
 “ they shall never see the Kingdom of
 “ God

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“ God, who instead of seeking it in
 “ the first place, make it their last Re-
 “ fuge and Retreat. And when they
 “ find themselves under the Sentence
 “ of Death and Damnation, only to
 “ avoid present Execution, and since
 “ there is no other remedy, do at last
 “ bethink themselves of getting to
 “ *Heaven*, and fall upon their Knees,
 “ to Petition the *Great Judge of the*
 “ *World*, that they may be transported
 “ thither.

“ Can any Man in reason expect
 “ that such a Petition will be granted ?
 “ *I tell you nay ; but except you repent*
 “ sooner, and at a fitter time, and after
 “ a better fashion, *you shall certainly pe-*
 “ *rish*. As much as God desires the
 “ Salvation of Men, he will not prosti-
 “ tute *Heaven*, and set the Gates of it
 “ wide open to those, who only fly to
 “ it in extremity, but never sought it
 “ in good earnest, nor indeed do now
 “ care for it, or desire it for any other
 “ reason, but to excuse them from
 “ going to *Hell*. They have no value
 “ for *Heaven*, because they are in no
 “ wise

“ wise fit for it. But yet they think
 “ *Hell* to be the worse place of the
 two.

“ I am afraid this is the true Inter-
 “ pretation of many a Man's Repen-
 “ tance, who hath deferred it till he
 “ comes to dye. I do not speak this to
 “ discourage Repentance even at that
 “ time. I deny not the possibility of
 “ the thing. But to speak the best of
 “ it, it is a very dangerous Remedy.
 “ For, alas, how unfit are most Men
 “ at such a time for so great and seri-
 “ ous a Work as Repentance is, when
 “ they are unfit for the smallest matter,
 “ and how hard is it for any Man then
 “ to be assured of the truth and reality
 “ of his Repentance, when there is no
 “ sufficient opportunity to make trial
 “ of the sincerity of it? I desire to have
 “ as large apprehensions of the Mercy
 “ of God as any man. But withal, I
 “ am very sure that he is the hardest to
 “ be imposed upon, of any one in the
 “ World. And no Man that hath any
 “ worthy apprehensions of the Deity
 “ can imagine him to be so easy, as to
 “ for-

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“ forgive Men upon the last Word and
“ Intimation of their Minds ; and to
“ have such a fondness for Offenders
“ as would reflect upon the Prudence
“ of any Magistrate and Governor up-
“ on Earth.

“ God grant that I may sincerely endea-
“ vour to live a Holy and Virtuons Life ;
“ and may have the comfort of that when
“ I come to die. And that I may never be
“ so unwise, as to venture all my hopes
“ of a blessed Eternity upon a Death-bed
“ Repentance.

Vid. Archbishop Tillotson's Ser. on Eccles.
32. 1. and Ser. on Heb. 3. 13.

FINIS.

